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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

DIALOGUE SESSIONS WITH MAJOR GROUPS

Summary report of the dialogue session with children and youth

(11 April 1997)

Chairman: Ambassador John Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda), Vice-Chairman, Commission on Sustainable Development

Facilitators: Ms. Danijela Zunec, Rescue Mission-Croatia, and Mr. Peter Wilson, Global Kids, Jamaica/USA

Presenters: Representatives of the following non-governmental youth organizations made presentations: Rescue Mission: Planet Earth; Canadian Environmental Network-Youth Caucus; Latin American Youth Network (REJULADS); Q2000; PlayFair! Europe; International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations; ASEED-Europe, ASEED-Japan, and ASEED-Australia; Students Partnership Worldwide; and, Global Kids, Jamaica/USA

PRESENTATIONS

The panellists highlighted the importance of chapter 25 (Children and youth in sustainable development) of Agenda 21. In describing their numerous activities, youth participants demonstrated the unique role that young people play in furthering the implementation of Agenda 21. Youth participants also

discussed the major obstacles they are encountering and outlined priorities for the future.

Activities

As described in their presentations, young people are undertaking a diverse array of sustainable development initiatives. Their efforts aim at raising awareness, strengthening bilateral partnerships, improving the environment, and addressing social problems. Some of these activities are listed below.

- School seminars, theatre productions, posters, stickers, newsletters, web sites, protests, lobbying, and participation in local decision-making have been instrumental in promoting understanding of, and attention to, sustainable development.

- The Children's Version of Agenda 21, and two reports on sustainability indicators (Mission Made Possible, 1996, and Future Watch, 1997), prepared by the Rescue Mission: Planet Earth network, have increased the accessibility of the sustainable development concept to young people around the world.

- Bilateral cooperation (Japanese/Swedish partners and Canadian/Latin American partners) have built youth partnerships for sustainable development beyond national borders.

- Recycling, reuse and regeneration, tree planting and stream enhancement have been important efforts in directly improving the environment.

- Young people have helped direct attention to social problems such as homelessness. A video made by Global Kids, for example, depicts the perspectives of the homeless and the problems they face, and proposes possible solutions.

Obstacles

Despite their numerous achievements, youth participants pointed out that certain obstacles prevent them from making even greater contributions to sustainable development. As described below, these obstacles involve lack of awareness regarding sustainability issues, limited access to information and decision-making, political corruption, gender inequities and consumerism.

- Few local people are aware of Agenda 21 and Governments are reluctant to assume leadership to run national awareness-raising campaigns.

- The closed, bureaucratic nature of many Governments reduce adequate youth access to information or participation in decision-making.

- The low attendance of delegations at the dialogue session reflects some of the problems young people face in getting Governments to listen to them.

- In some Governments, corruption prevents realization of sustainable development.

- Gender prejudices in some countries diminish the education of women and young girls, thereby weakening efforts for a sustainable world.

- Current patterns of consumption are a threat to sustainable development in many areas.

Priorities

Youth participants highlighted three priority areas for the future: funding, education and participation. As indicated below, progress in these areas is important for furthering the involvement of youth in future sustainable development efforts.

- Young people constitute 50 per cent of the population. The allocation of government funds should be more transparent and should better reflect the size of the youth constituency.

- Education is essential for promoting sustainability and should be strengthened via partnerships between schools, Governments, universities and non-formal educators, and attention to the preservation of indigenous resources and practices.

- Young people themselves can be important in educating and raising awareness not only among themselves (through peer education) but also among adults.

DIALOGUE

Representatives of the following Governments made statements: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Jamaica, Jordan, France, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Netherlands, Norway, Panama, Philippines, Romania, Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America. The representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) made a statement. The representative of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) also made a statement.

In their statements, government representatives commended the youth groups on their accomplishments, particularly for their work on sustainable development indicators and their other awareness-raising efforts (United States and Jamaica). Some representatives stated that the low attendance at the meeting was due to many simultaneous meetings rather than a lack of interests on the part of Governments (Belgium). One representative noted that some of the young panellists might become government representatives themselves and that they should remember the empty seats today to make sure that they were not empty in the future (Hungary).

Several government representatives provided advice for the future. One representative advised the panellists to be more demanding of Governments and to secure media coverage for their presentations (United Republic of Tanzania). Others advised young people to demonstrate sustainable lifestyles (United Kingdom) and some suggested involving more young people in future United Nations

meetings. One representative requested the panellists to outline their hopes for the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly (Canada).

Comments were also made on financial and economic issues. Child labour, for example, is a serious problem in some countries and one which youth participants might wish to confront (ICFTU). Children and youth are often the target of those who want to promote unsustainable consumption patterns (Philippines). Yet peer education can be instrumental in resisting adoption of such patterns (Ireland). Micro-financing can be important for youth at local to national levels (Uganda).

In responding to these comments, panellists acknowledged the importance of micro-financing and highlighted various forms of effective education. They also emphasized the need for activities at the grass-roots level; increased access to information; new and innovative endeavours to involve youth; financial commitments; and new ways for designing education.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Commission on Sustainable Development should acknowledge and aim at furthering the efforts of young people concerned about sustainable development. Some ways to encourage the enthusiasm, creativity and commitment exhibited by these young people are described below:

- Recognize that young people have much to offer and allow them to exercise their skills for sustainable development efforts within the United Nations.

- Encourage Governments to supply funding for youth activities.

- Establish a Commission on Sustainable Development youth consultancy programme (a pilot effort in this area in 1996 has enabled young people to participate directly in Commission activities and enhance their global network).

- Include youth in international forums and promote attention to youth concerns and contributions.

- Encourage countries to include youth representatives in national delegations to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

- Work to allow young people access to information.

- Promote innovative forms of education and creative ways to involve youth in decision-making processes.